BUILDING COLLABORATION BETWEEN THE CHILD WELFARE AND STREET-INVOLVED YOUTH SERVICES SECTORS IN HAMILTON

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.0 INTRODUCTION **1**

2.0 METHODOLOGY **2**

2.1 Literature and Model Reviews 2

2.2 Youth 2

2.3 Child Welfare Management Perspective 3

2.4 Street-Involved Youth Service Management Perspective 3

2.5 Front-line Staff-Collaborative Systems Consultation 3

3.0 CONTEXT SETTING **4**

3.1 Street-Involved Youth System Overview 4

3.2 Child Welfare System Overview 4

3.2.1 Child Welfare Transformation 5

3.2.2 Pathways Into the Child Welfare System 5

3.2.3 Pathways Out of the Child Welfare System 6

3.2.4 Child Welfare Agencies in Hamilton 6

3.3 Literature Review Findings 7

3.4 Model Review Findings 8

4.0 FINDINGS **10**

4.1 Youth 10

4.2 Child Welfare Perspective 11

4.3 Street-Involved Youth Services Perspective 12

4.4 Collaborative Systems Perspective 12

5.0 ANALYSIS **14**

6.0 NEXT STEPS **19**

7.0 APPENDICES

Appendix A: Youth Focus group questions
Appendix B: Key informant interview questions: Youth
Appendix C: Literature review
Appendix D: Model review case studies
Appendix E: Questions for the other sector
Appendix F: After-Care Worker Project Interim Evaluation

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In 2004, the Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton (SPRC) partnered with the Street-Youth Planning Collaborative (SYPC) to develop a community plan for addressing the needs of street-involved youth in Hamilton. Through a grant from the National Crime Prevention Centre, research was conducted in order to develop a profile of street-involved youth along with a best practices model for reducing the risk of youth homelessness[1]. One of the recommendations resulting from the research was to examine the connection between child welfare involvement and youth street-involvement. In 2008, the Homelessness Partnership Initiative (HPI) provided funding to The Catholic Children's Aid Society of Hamilton (CCAS) in partnership with The Children's Aid Society of Hamilton (CAS) and the SYPC for a three-pronged project- 1) supporting two transitional housing projects for street-involved and parenting youth, 2) providing aftercare support to youth in the community to help maintain housing and 3) to develop a community plan for reducing the risk of street-involvement for former youth in care. This report reflects the final result of the third prong.

The objectives of the project were:

- To identify the connection between child welfare involvement and youth street-involvement.
- To identify areas that provide an opportunity for child welfare agencies and community youth service agencies to collaborate in their work with street-involved youth.
- To develop a community plan involving child welfare agencies and community youth service agencies that will reduce the risk of street-involvement for former youth in care.

This project's findings are detailed in this report in the five following sections:

1) An outline of the project's research methodology.
2) The context setting for the project including current research and overviews of the youth services sectors in Hamilton.
3) The findings from the research.
4) An analysis of the project's findings.
5) Next steps stemming from the findings and analysis.

[1] To see the full *Addressing the Needs of Street-Involved and Homeless Youth in Hamilton* (October 2005) Report, visit www.sprc.hamilton.on.ca.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

The following section outlines the methodology used in the project's research. We captured the perspective of four key stakeholder groups- youth, child welfare management, street-involved youth services management and front-line staff from both systems. A number of methods were used to gather data including focus groups, key informant interviews and a community consultation. Literature and model reviews were also conducted.

2.1 Literature and Model Reviews

The current research on street-involved youth with child welfare histories was reviewed to provide a context and inform the project's research. The findings were compiled in a literature review that outlines the best practices for a community response to the needs of former youth in care.

A model review was conducted to determine the methods being used in other communities to respond to the needs of street-involved youth with child welfare histories. The review focuses on programs that utilize community partnerships within their work to provide support for former youth in care.

2.2 Youth

In order to gain the perspective of youth, we spoke to them directly in focus groups and key informant interviews. Two separate groups of youth were identified to provide insight into their needs from child welfare and street-involved youth service providers:

Youth who are struggling with street-involvement

This group of youth was defined as having been housed for less than six months and having had experiences of street-involvement. All youth spoken to had past involvement with a child welfare agency.

Two focus groups were conducted with youth who are struggling with street-involvement. One focus group was held at Good Shepherd Notre Dame House with seven participants and another at the Living Rock with seven participants.

We spoke to two youth separately in a key informant interview format. One youth interview was held at the Good Shepherd Notre Dame School and the other at the Living Rock.

Youth who are living independently successfully

We defined this group of youth as being housed independently for six months or more. All youth spoken to had past involvement with a child welfare agency.

One focus group was conducted with youth living independently successfully. It was held at the CCAS's Drop-In Program with eight youth participating. An attempt was made to convene a second focus group but these efforts were not successful. Instead we spoke to two youth separately, one at the CAS and one at Good Shepherd Notre Dame School using the focus group questions as the basis for the interviews.

We conducted two key informant interviews with youth who are living independently successfully. One youth was interviewed at Good Shepherd Notre Dame School and the other at the Living Rock.

2.3 Child Welfare Management Perspective

To identify means of community collaboration from the child welfare perspective, we conducted two key informant interviews with directors from the two local child welfare agencies.

2.4 Street-Involved Youth Services Management Perspective

We held two key informant interviews with street-involved youth community service directors in order to gain their perspective on methods of community collaboration.

2.5 Front-line Staff- Collaborative Systems Consultation

We hosted a half-day event for front-line staff from the child welfare agencies and street-involved youth service agencies in Hamilton. The event was attended by eight staff from the child welfare sector and eighteen staff from the community youth services sector. The participants were divided into four discussion groups in order to identify assets, gaps and opportunities for better cross-sectored communication.

3.0 CONTEXT SETTING

The following section provides a context for the project's research. It includes an overview of the child welfare and street-involved youth service systems in Hamilton. It also provides summaries of both the literature review findings and model review findings.

3.1 Street-Involved Youth Service System

Young people facing street-involvement and homelessness require a continuum of supports to help them achieve independence from basic street outreach to more complex and long term interventions such as transitional housing:

Street Outreach - Emergency Shelter - Hot Meal Programs - Food Banks - Open Access Programming - Primary Health Services - Services for Pregnant and Parenting Teens - Mental Health Services - Substance Use and Misuse Services - Employment and Education Supports - Housing Help Services - Transitional Housing

Currently, the organizations partnering through the Street Youth Planning Collaborative[2] deliver the services described in the continuum. Additional resources are required to ensure a comprehensive and stable system; however, most youth aged 16 – 21 (and sometimes up to 25) can find services to address each of their needs.

System collaboration is critical to delivering a seamless continuum of supports. To that end, the street-involved youth service system works to collaborate with and between each of the three stakeholder groups:

- The Street Youth Planning Collaborative does executive level planning and funding development work;
- The Street Involved Youth Network engages front line staff in discussing service delivery experiences and emerging trends in the youth population;
- The Street Youth Involvement Committee is a group of young people who have or are experiencing street-involvement who are engaged to provide their perspective and advice.

3.2 Child Welfare System

Children's Aid Societies have the exclusive mandate to perform legislated functions related to protecting children from abuse and neglect. The Legislation (Child and Family Services Act), regulations, directives and standards prescribe specific and detailed requirements regarding what the Societies must provide to children and families, how they must provide the services and timelines in which these services must be performed. For the purpose of this report, it is important to understand how children and youth enter into and exit from the care of a child welfare agency. This overview is meant to highlight the processes by which youth move through the system and are supported through their transition to independent living.

[2] The SYPC is Alternatives for Youth, Catholic Family Services, Good Shepherd – Youth Services, Living Rock Ministries, Wesley Urban Ministries, Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton (ex-officio).

3.2.1 Child Welfare Transformation

In 2006, amendments to the Child and Family Services Act lead to the implementation of the Transformation Agenda within child welfare agencies in Ontario. Child welfare transformation involves the implementation of changes that focuses on specific areas for strategy development. The identified areas are:

Differential Response

The differential response approach is flexible and customized to address individual needs while engaging the family in the planning process. Service delivery includes collaborative planning methods and connection to community resources while addressing the cultural and emotional needs of children.

Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR)

ADR is a strength-based, collaborative approach to resolving child welfare issues such as care and custody. There are varying ADR methods but all focus on encouraging the involvement of the family, extended family and community in the planning process.

Permanency Planning Options

This change focuses on the expansion of long-term planning and permanency options for children receiving services from child welfare agencies. There are a variety of directions for permanency planning including supporting families to prevent a child's admission into care, legal custody arrangements that address family challenges and new adoption initiatives.

Kinship Service and Kinship Care

The goal of kinship service is to place a child with protection concerns with an extended family member or community caregiver in order to promote permanency for children within their own community. Kinship care involves placing a child in care of a child welfare agency with an extended family or community member in a foster care arrangement.

3.2.2 Pathways Into the Child Welfare System

Families and children can enter into the service of a child welfare agency in several ways. Additionally, they can become involved with the Society on a voluntary basis without a child coming into the care of the Society. The family and the Society would develop a service plan in support of their work together.

Temporary Care Agreement: The custody of a child is transferred temporarily to a child welfare agency for a maximum period of 6 months and may be extended for an additional 6 months. This is a voluntary arrangement between the Society, the parent(s) and the child over the age of 12 years.

Supervision Order: A child remains in his/her community (in own home or other arrangements) under the supervision of a child welfare agency. The order may last from 3 to 12 months and can be extended indefinitely. The child is not considered to be in care.

Society Wardship Order: Through a court order, a child is placed into the care and custody of a child welfare agency for up to 12 months. The parent gives up guardianship for the duration of the order.

Crown Wardship Order: Through a court order, the care, custody and control of a child is permanently transferred to a child welfare agency.

Temporary Order for Care and Custody: This involves a court ruling concerning a child's care and custody prior to any other finding regarding potential wardship status.

(Note: Unless a youth in care has been made a Crown Ward with No Access, work with the family will continue.)

3.2.3 Pathways Out of the Child Welfare System

Youth can leave the care of the Society in a number of ways including through planned repatriation to their family. Youth may also leave care to be with Kin with the approval of the Society and a permanency plan may be developed that could include Kin pursuing custody of the child.

Youth transitioning to independent living at age 18 can continue to receive support via Extended Care and Maintenance (ECM). Youth with Crown Ward status may enter an agreement with the Society and receive financial support from a child welfare agency from the age of 18 to 21. Youth may have to meet certain criteria in order to collect ECM such as having employment, being enrolled in an educational or training program or completion of a life skills program.

Youth with Crown Ward status may also chose to move on to independence at the age of 18 and terminate their relationship with the Society but they can reconnect with the Society after their 18th birthday in the event that they want to access support or revisit the option of ECM supports.

3.2.4 Child Welfare Agencies in Hamilton

In Hamilton the two child welfare agencies that follow the Child and Family Services Act are the Children's Aid Society of Hamilton and the Catholic Children's Aid Society of Hamilton. Both agencies provide programming and support to prepare and assist youth who are leaving the care of the child welfare system.

The Children's Aid Society of Hamilton focuses on permanency planning with children in care by establishing a "Choosing a Road" plan by age 14. Planning includes working with the youth to look at all developmental domains including education, health and social and family relationships. The development of educational/vocational goals is part of the process. The development of a plan includes the youth's worker and his/her caregivers. Youth are assisted in their preparation for independent living through one-to-one support with child welfare and child and youth workers who assist them in the areas of life skills, housing and community resources. Community service referral and information is provided to youth through access to an on-site computer and resource binder. The Children's Aid Society also has a homelessness initiative that assists Crown Wards in obtaining housing and provides services including rent top-ups, starter kits and beds.

The Catholic Children's Aid Society of Hamilton provides life skills programs to prepare youth who are transitioning out of care. The programming assists youth in the establishment of educational and career goals that are reflected in their plans of care.
The programs are:

Life Skills program: The program includes three levels of life skills training. Younger youth are provided with an introduction to the acquisition of life skills and the opportunity to obtain a connection to positive mentorship. In addition, formalized life skills groups that address budgeting, meal planning and preparation and spirituality are provided. An advanced life skills program is available to those youth who successfully complete the first level programming. A check clinic is also held monthly to provide youth living independently with an opportunity to get assistance with budgeting issues and to connect with agency staff. In addition, the CCAS offers a "free store" for youth to pick up essential items that they may require.

Drop-In program: A youth drop-in is held weekly to provide youth with mentorship from staff and volunteers. The program has been established to allow youth to connect, get support, gather and share resources/information and to learn to manage key issues they may be facing. The program's activities and events focus on important relevant topics for youth including gang violence, internet safety and employment. The program is targeted for crown wards and wards who are transitioning and need ongoing supports.

Youth Leaders program: The program's purpose is to create a strong leadership group within the in-care population who can act as mentors to other youth in care. In addition, the program provides the opportunity for youth to develop leadership and self advocacy skills.

3.3 Literature Review Findings

A review of the literature reveals that youth with child welfare involvement face challenges that put them at a higher risk of becoming street-involved or homeless. They are impacted by unique experiences that occur before, during and after their time in care and create barriers for a successful transition to independent living. The number of children in care nearly doubled from 10,000 in the early 1990s to over 18,000 in 2003-2004[3]. These numbers indicate a rise in the number of youth leaving the child welfare system and a need to put a more comprehensive support plan in place.

Recommendations for child welfare policy changes for youth leaving care have already been put forward by the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies following an extensive survey of youth and CAS staff [4]. Another step is a community response involving both child welfare and youth serving agencies to address the needs of youth with child welfare involvement.

[3] Gough, P. (2005). *Ontario's Child Welfare System.* CECW Information #31E. Centre of Excellence for Child Welfare.

[4] Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies. (2006). *Youth Leaving Care: An OACAS Survey of Youth and CAS Staff.* Youth Leaving Care Project.

The literature reveals several areas that would lead to a best practices approach for community planning to reduce the risk of street-involvement for former youth in care:

Service Coordination: A more holistic approach to service provision through communication and integration between agencies will reduce the risk of street-involvement for youth.

Resource Information: The availability of resource information has been identified by both youth and service providers as an important support for youth striving towards independence.

Youth Involvement: The involvement of youth in the development and implementation process is an important component in the community planning process. Services must be designed and delivered in a way that is seen as beneficial and meaningful to youth.

Program Development: Agency communication is an important component in identifying gaps in service and providing a wider awareness of problem areas. This is perceived as the impetus needed to promote the development of new programs or expand the scope of existing ones.

The research makes it clear that street-involvement and homelessness are common experiences for youth from the child welfare system who strive toward independent living. The literature addressing this problem suggests that changes to child welfare policy needs to be accompanied by a plan for intervention by the community as a whole. Areas of opportunities that are consistently identified for collaborative planning are services coordination, resource information, youth involvement and program development. Together they point to the importance of multi-agency coordination and communication in developing a plan for intervention.

3.4 Model Review Findings

In order to provide a context for our research it was important to review community planning models being undertaken in other cities. A model review was conducted as a means of gathering information about collaboration processes between the child welfare and street-involved youth services sectors in other communities. We spoke to agencies in four cities in Ontario- Toronto, London, Waterloo and Ottawa. The interviews focused on initiatives and partnerships that exist between the two sectors within their communities. The following six areas provide an overview of collaboration methods being developed in the four cities.

Services Forums: Forums have been developed that bring together child welfare agencies and community members from a specific service area such as housing or employment. The purpose is to develop processes for agencies to work together and methods for connecting youth to services.

Community Coalitions: Members from child welfare and community services agencies partner together on coalitions that address homelessness and street-involvement.

Child welfare services in the community: Child welfare agencies have developed services that are housed in the community to service youth. These include a transitional housing project, an addictions counseling service and a semi-independent youth shelter.

Upper management level partnerships: A partnership has been formed between the executive directors of a child welfare agency and youth services bureau to develop a collaborative method

for servicing youth. It has enhanced working relationships between the front-line workers from the two sectors.

Resource programming: Child welfare agencies are developing programming within their transitioning youth groups to connect youth to community resources more effectively. Methods include a "scavenger hunt" that requires youth to form into groups and find resources in the community to meet their needs.

One-stop service centre for youth in care: The child welfare agencies in one city have established a centre that provides services to youth with child welfare histories. The centre addresses a comprehensive range of youth needs and works in collaboration with an extensive list of community partners.

Case studies for two of the models are included in Appendix D of this report.

4.0 FINDINGS

The following section describes the findings from the focus groups, key informant interviews and collaborative systems consultation. It is divided into four main sections- findings from youth, findings from the child welfare perspective, findings from the street-involved youth services perspective and findings from the collaborative systems perspective.

4.1 Findings from Youth

Three focus groups and six key informant interviews were conducted with youth. It was important to have youth identify their needs in order to provide a foundation for collaborative planning by the child welfare and street-involved youth service sectors. In total 28 youth were consulted.

What services/supports need to be available?

Youth identified that they needed training around three domains: life skills development, housing and employment/education.

Life skills training was identified by youth as the most important support needed to prepare them for independent living. Cooking and budgeting skills were mentioned most frequently in this context followed by cleaning, grocery shopping and time management. Youth indicated that effective methods of life skills training were programs while in care, support during their transition and assistance once they were living independently.

The youth we spoke to emphasized the importance of having someone to help them obtain housing. Several means of effective housing supports were identified and included community housing services and direct assistance from child welfare workers. Youth suggested that housing support should be in the areas of landlord advocacy, furniture provision and transportation for moving.

Youth talked about the need for support in relation to attending school and gaining employment. Enrolling in secondary schools was identified as a challenge by youth who had moved frequently and needed assistance to navigate the school system. They also put forward the need for support with post-secondary studies in regards to the application process and loans and bursaries. Youth identified the importance of employment programs to help them with resume writing and job searching.

In addition, youth indicated that they needed existing and new ways of involvement from the child welfare system. It was identified that one-to-one direct support from a child welfare worker during the transition to independent living was an effective support. It was also indicated that skills training and resource education while in care was a means of enhancing their chance of successful independent living. Suggestions for new methods of support included transportation allowances, financial support for pet care and peer support from former youth in care.

What barriers and gaps exist?

A barrier consistently identified by youth was that they did not have the skills needed to prepare them for independent living. Many of the youth indicated that the group home setting does not

teach youth the life skills needed for independent living and that they had not been involved in life skills programming. In general, a lack of experience of how to live on their own presented challenges for youth in maintaining housing in the community.

Youth identified other barriers to independent living as lack of affordable housing, discrimination from landlords, low income, difficulties obtaining employment and a lack of transportation. While many youth identified community services that could assist them with these barriers, others indicated that they lacked knowledge of where to go for help. It was often mentioned that community services need to be expanded and made more accessible. Likewise, youth indicated that they would benefit from an expansion of services from the child welfare system.

Suggestions for improving services/supports

Life skills training was consistently identified as an area that needed to be improved to help youth live independently. Suggestions in this area included a comprehensive training program and one-to-one support to teach youth the living skills they need.
Other suggestions included training by former youth in care who could advise them on the realities of independent living.

Youth indicated that improvements to the community service system could provide them with the additional support they need. Suggestions included more shelter spaces, improved food banks, a drop-in centre and more support from the school system.

Expanding child welfare support for youth leaving care was identified as a means for improving their chances for successful independent living. Suggestions included a savings fund, start-up bursaries, provision of furniture and household items and wiping out their existing debt before they transition.

4.2 Child Welfare Perspective

Two key informant interviews were conducted with directors from each of the child welfare agencies in Hamilton. The questions focused on mechanisms for cross-sectored collaboration with the street-involved youth service systems for the benefit of youth transitioning from care.

What are the successes of the current relationship between the two sectors?

The child welfare sector identified a history of productive working relationships with community agencies in Hamilton in order to serve youth. The Homelessness Partnership Initiative project currently underway was seen to be promoting further integration between the two sectors.

What are the barriers?

In terms of challenges to collaboration, the child welfare participants identified differences in policies and systemic structures that exist between the two sectors. Differences in organizational size and funding structures were seen to create barriers when attempting to develop working relationships.

A second identified challenge was a lack of knowledge regarding the other sector and the processes by which they operate. This challenge was seen to lead to misconceptions and bias toward the other sector and create further barriers to the collaborative process.

What would it take to develop more collaboration between the two sectors?

Child welfare participants agreed that ideal collaboration included open communication, flexibility and a mutual understanding of the benefits and challenges of collaboration. Suggestions for developing collaboration were cross-sectored education and information sharing as well as expanded planning in a more formalized and strategic process.

It was also suggested that the presence of child welfare staff on the Street-Involved Youth Network (SIYN) and other boards in the community would help to develop relationships within the two sectors. An expanded focus on preventative measures to stop the cycle of youth homelessness was another identified method for moving forward collaboratively.

4.3 Street-Involved Youth Services Perspective

Two key informant interviews were conducted with directors from two of the street-involved youth service agencies in Hamilton.

What are the successes of the current relationship between the two sectors?

Street-involved youth services participants identified that the working relationship between the two sectors for servicing individual youth was an ongoing strength. In terms of the larger systems, they indicated that their current Homelessness Partnership Initiative project had created a better understanding of the processes needed to work together effectively.

What are the barriers?

An identified challenge to the process was the amount of time needed to develop effective collaboration. Successful communication and planning processes are impeded by the time constraints of both funding timelines and the schedules of the community partners involved. Further identified challenges involve a lack of understanding of the other sector and of the benefits of collaboration across systems.

What would it take to develop more collaboration between the two sectors?

Ideal collaboration was identified as a thoughtful and planned system of services where each sector dedicates the time and resources to ensuring the needs of youth are best served. This was seen to involve a thorough understanding of how to navigate the other system and to let go of ideas of ownership over clients and programs. Another identified need was opportunities for directors and managers to discuss gaps and means for collaboration so that the information filters down throughout individual agencies.

4.4 Collaborative Systems Consultation

A consultation was conducted with front-line staff from the child welfare agencies and street-involved youth service agencies in Hamilton. The event was attended by eight staff from the child welfare sector and eighteen staff from the community services sector. In total 26 front-line staff were consulted.

How do you work well together?

The two sectors recognized that their common goal of working in the best interests of youth was their biggest strength in working collaboratively. This was seen to result in positive communication and working relationships on a case by case basis to service youth. They also indicated that their ability to respect the challenges faced by front-line workers worked across the boundaries of their perspective sectors.

What are the challenges/ barriers?

In terms of challenges, the participants indicated that time constraints affected their ability to effectively communicate with the other sector. A further identified barrier was a lack of knowledge about other agencies in relation to the services they provide. Misconceptions and bias toward the other sector was also put forward as a challenge in promoting successful working relationships.

Working across the differences between the two systems was identified as a challenge in a multitude of areas. The two sectors are seen to diverge in terms of policies, funding, mandated services, liabilities and underlying philosophies.

What is the best way for the two sectors to work together?

In identifying methods for the two sectors to work together, the participants stressed the importance of more cross-sectored education and training. They indicated that increased understanding of the systems would lead to further communication and increased collaboration.

Another suggestion was the need to be intentional about collaboration by forming partnerships between the two systems. They indicated that management level participation would be necessary to achieve these ends as front-line workers could not do it in isolation.

5.0 ANALYSIS

The following section provides an analysis of the research findings. As evidenced in the findings- there was much consensus between the youth around their needs and between the two sectors in terms of the successes and challenges of cross-sectored collaboration. This section is organized into seven areas that were identified in the research as either opportunities or challenges to community collaboration.

Youth indicate that they receive supports from both the child welfare and street-involved youth services sectors.

The findings from the youth focus groups and key informant interviews provided a foundation for the direction and understanding of how the two systems need to work together. When speaking to youth it became evident that they were utilizing services from both sectors in order to meet their needs. This service usage overlap points to the benefits of having the systems collaborate and coordinate services.

The literature review findings reveal that youth identify that "the supports needed for a successful transition include child welfare agency assistance, access to community resources and connections within the community". Overwhelmingly, the youth participants in the focus groups and key informant interviews who were living independently successfully had used services from both the child welfare and street-involved youth services sectors. One interview participant had received both one-to-one support from a child welfare worker and services from the community to transition into independent living. While she talked about the importance of her child welfare support worker, she felt that her success was also dependent on a community housing service- "foster kids can't take their furniture with them when they leave and need help getting stuff for their apartment".

The youth we interviewed who were struggling with street-involvement had voluntarily broken ties with the child welfare system before they moved into independent living. The participants indicated that the addition of child welfare support would have improved their chances of living on their own- "I kind of wish I'd stayed in it now because they give you help and money for an apartment and I'm on welfare and they don't give you anything".

Youth indicate that supports and services need to be enhanced in certain areas.

The youth participants indicated that the supports they were accessing did not fully address their overall spectrum of needs. They put forward suggestions on how the supports from both sectors could be improved or expanded. The youth who were struggling with street-involvement were more likely to suggest that current supports from both sectors were inadequate. Their suggestions for improvement included more shelters and food banks, a drop-in centre and expanded training programs while in care.

Although support in a variety of areas was mentioned, life skills development was talked about consistently by both groups. Youth indicated that it was necessary to have support in the form of training and preparation before living on their own and further support once out in the community- "there needs to be a full training program and maybe pre-independence private living similar to group homes but private apartments and introductions to different organizations like Living Rock and Urban Core".

The child welfare and street-involved youth services sectors work well together on a case by case basis to address the needs of youth.

A consistent finding when speaking to participants from the child welfare and street-involved youth services systems was their successful partnerships when serving individual youth. The two systems appear to work well together to address the needs of youth who are clients of both systems. These partnerships provide an opportunity for building a strong collaborative effort that moves from individual partnerships to programming and larger systems.

Literature review findings indicate that "a combination of complementary services can provide more flexibility in supporting the needs of individual youth". Child welfare staff in the OACAS survey indicated that linking youth to community services such as "housing, education, social engagement, health and mental health resources" improves their chances for success. Both child welfare and community services participants talked about the long and productive relationships that exist between agencies throughout the two sectors. Both recognized the strength and benefit of the work being undertaken to service youth who intersect with both systems.

Participants from the collaborative systems consultation identified that their partnerships in individual youth cases were an integral part of their daily work. Overwhelmingly, the participants indicated that their casework depended on services other than their own and that they couldn't function effectively without them. Their ability to work together was primarily attributed to both sectors being "mainly committed towards the needs of youth and having their best interests in mind". It was also frequently mentioned that they were "respectful of the challenges that front-line face each day" and this enabled them to work productively for the benefit of youth. The belief that these partnerships are important to their work has created a collaborative foundation between agencies in the two sectors. This was recognized within the consultation as an opportunity for community collaboration development using a "bottom up approach".

Partnerships and initiatives that have already been undertaken by the child welfare and community services sectors have lead to a greater understanding of the benefits and processes involved in community collaboration.

In Hamilton, the child welfare and street-involved youth services sectors have formed partnerships and worked together on initiatives to address the needs of street-involved youth with child welfare histories. A committee comprised of directors from both the child welfare agencies and the street-involved youth service agencies has been formed to develop projects with funding from the Homelessness Partnership Initiative. The committee uses collaborative processes to develop and provide direction for initiatives that address the needs of street-involved youth. A central project is the after-care worker project that houses child welfare workers in community agencies to provide after-care support to youth who are living on their own. The development of these partnerships and projects has lead to a greater understanding of systems collaboration and of the processes needed to increase its effectiveness.

Literature review findings identify that benefits arising from community collaboration include "a wider range of identified needs will be addressed by the services best suited for the task" and a "combination of complementary services can provide more flexibility in supporting the needs of individual youth". Participants from the child welfare and community services sectors articulated that the two sectors' work together was positive and had lead to a mutual understanding of the benefits and challenges involved. Overall, there was recognition that cross-sectored collaboration benefits youth who interact with both systems. The front-line participants pointed

to a variety of benefits arising from agency collaboration between the two systems. These included greater access to a variety of networks, the ability to utilize the expertise of others and a wrap around effect for clients using resources from both sectors.

The partnerships already undertaken have also created a greater understanding of the processes needed to achieve collaboration. Child welfare participants indicated that the processes needed to enhance their present work were more in-depth planning and strategic direction. Community services participants had achieved greater understanding of the time needed for long-term planning and core work as well as processes around staff interviewing and training. Collaborative systems participants felt that collaborative processes should include open communication, relationship building and opportunities for workers from the two sectors to come together to develop methods for working together.

Cross-sectored education, training and information-sharing can enhance the development of community collaboration.

Evaluation participants consistently identified that a barrier to collaboration was a lack of knowledge and understanding of the other sector. Misconceptions and biases that exist between the systems were perceived to be the result of this challenge. The collaborative efforts undertaken through various projects were seen as providing an opportunity to develop clarification of the other sectors' roles and processes. Child welfare, community services and collaborative systems participants articulated their belief that cross-sectored education, training and information-sharing will enhance the collaborative process.

Literature review findings revealed that youth reported a need for "information about what they are entitled to regarding money and services from the CAS and from community". Youth participants in the focus groups and interviews demonstrated the benefits of receiving supports from both sectors. It follows that workers who can provide accurate information and have working relationships with other services can increase youth's chances to succeed. As the literature indicates, "agencies need to actively provide comprehensive resource information to the youth who will benefit from them".

A lack of knowledge leading to misconceptions about the other sector was identified as a barrier by participants in the child welfare, community services and collaborative systems consultations. The lack of understanding was discussed on two levels. Firstly, many participants indicated that there was a lack of clarity of the other sectors' role in a broader systems sense. Secondly, it was identified that misinformation and a lack of awareness of other services was preventing workers from linking youth to appropriate resources. It was indicated that these challenges can lead to inaccurate assumptions, expectations and biases toward other agencies.

Cross-sectored education and training was consistently identified by child welfare, community services and collaborative systems participants as a means of addressing this barrier. Suggestions for educational development included training seminars, open forums, agency tours and presentations at staff meetings. Child welfare and community services participants identified the benefits of increased communication within partnerships and the development of a community profile. Participants in the collaborative systems consultation stressed the importance of developing opportunities for child welfare and community service workers to come together to increase knowledge, understanding and improve networking between the two sectors. They suggested that "power in numbers" would lead to a better system for addressing the needs of youth.

The amount of time and resources available to individual agencies presents a challenge to collaborative work.

An identified challenge to achieving effective community collaboration was the amount of time and resources needed to dedicate to the process. From their previous project work, child welfare and community services participants had discovered that an extensive time commitment was required for the development and ongoing process of their work. Funding timeframes and agency commitments presented a challenge in terms of time allotment for core work development. It was identified that effective change takes time and is an ongoing process of learning and moving forward.

Collaborative systems participants frequently identified "time and resource pressure" as a presenting barrier to collaborative work. Some participants cited that the size of their caseloads left them with limited time to spend developing community partnerships. Others discussed a lack of resources within their agencies and in the community as a whole. The benefits of sharing resources was acknowledged but considered a challenging endeavor with the amount of time and funding they had to work with. These identified factors were seen to challenge their ability to "connect with other agencies" and "to develop the knowledge and wisdom" to navigate other systems.

The differences that exist between the two sectors are a barrier to community collaboration.

When discussing barriers to collaborative work, participants in the research frequently mentioned the differences between the two sectors. Child welfare and street-involved youth services participants identified the challenges presented by systems level differences that needed to be addressed during project development. In particular, a great deal of time was spent navigating systemic challenges when the two sectors initiated the After-Care Worker project. By housing child welfare workers in community agencies, the project partners needed to develop after-care worker roles that fit within the systems level structure of both sectors. Participants also discussed the challenges of working across the organizational structures of the two sectors. The child welfare agencies are large organizations that have been operating for many years. In comparison, the street-involved youth services agencies are smaller and have been in operation for varying amounts of time. Services in the community tend to change more frequently as some will close and new ones will open. While the child welfare agencies remain consistent in this aspect, they are undergoing large structural changes with the enactment of the transformation agenda.

Collaborative systems participants identified that the differences between the two sectors impact on their ability to work together. They indicated that differing philosophies and priorities between the two systems often lead to diverging approaches to youth service. It was identified that workers from the two sectors "put safety first but then have different focuses". The difference in agency mandates was also identified as a barrier to collaboration between workers from the two sectors. In particular, mandate restraints that are attached to agency services do not allow workers to partner with the other sector as well as they could. Differing rules and liabilities also create a different approach to service. Some participants also cited "differences in language" that exist between the two sectors provide a challenge to communication and understanding between individual workers.

Collaborative planning is challenged when different levels within individual agencies are not working together toward community collaboration.

While most of the research centered on methods for the two sectors to collaborate, it was also identified that work needed to be done within individual agencies to improve the process. A community services participant identified the need for all levels within agencies to be aware of the collaborative efforts and partnerships that were being forged within their organizations. Knowledge and information sharing needed to happen at the executive director level to allow it to "filter down through the agencies". Further communication and awareness building with front-line staff was also identified as a means of promoting collaboration efforts within the agency. The effects of greater agency awareness would extend into the context of the broader community.

Participants in the collaborative systems consultation identified the importance of having upper management actively involve them in collaborative work. In order for them to work with other agencies, they identified that their "organization must be pro-collaboration". They put forward the belief that agency leadership would benefit from learning about the experiences of front-line workers in their daily efforts to work across sectors. They indicated that the responsibility for sharing this information rested with both front-line staff and management.

6.0 NEXT STEPS

The findings in this report have identified areas that provide opportunities to build a stronger foundation of community collaboration within Hamilton. It has also identified challenges that need to be addressed in order to achieve a collaborative system of services for youth with child welfare histories. From the research we understand that systems collaboration is a building process. The suggestions outlined in this section are organized to reflect this finding.

The next steps are organized by the following three levels of systems collaboration building:

1) **Case to case, individual level:** The findings have lead to an understanding that collaboration at the individual worker level is the easiest to attain and reflects the current situation in Hamilton.

2) **Cross-sectored project and service development:** The findings have also lead us to understand that the joint service delivery piece is starting to move forward in Hamilton.

3) **Systems Planning:** We understand that the ultimate goal is systems collaboration.

In addition, the next steps reflect suggestions for service providers and planners in the child welfare and street-involved youth service systems for building on this process. The suggestions are derived from the local consultations and the literature.

Case to case, individual level

The importance of building collaborative efforts at the individual worker to worker level is based on three key findings of the research. Firstly, there is a service usage overlap by youth between the two sectors. Secondly, the two systems already work well together on a case by case basis to serve individual youth. Thirdly, casework is dependent on services from the other sector and could not function effectively without them. The research findings point to the following methods and processes for partnership building:

Cross-sectored educational opportunities

It has been identified that child welfare and community service members need to develop knowledge about other agencies to reduce misconceptions and biases. Suggestions for achieving this objective include agency tours and presentations and a shared web information system. The use of accessible language and messaging is an important factor in ensuring the effectiveness of information sharing.

Joint training

Joint training will provide workers with insight into the ways that the sectors operate and discover methods for working across their differences. It will also provide both sectors with the same messages and information. It was suggested that youth take part in the forums so they can share their experiences and ideas. There also needs to be a process in place to encourage the attendance of workers who are less willing to engage in additional training.

Educational opportunities in the broader community

The two sectors should extend their learning to other systems in the community in order to increase the opportunities for street-involved youth. Broader structural organizations such as the education and health systems could improve the successes of youth with increased understanding of the challenges faced by the street-involved youth population.

Building relationships through regular networking opportunities

Opportunities to network and get to know workers from the other sector should be set up so that working relationships can be established. A suggestion for achieving this objective is to set up groups such as the Street-Involved Youth Network who meet monthly to discuss their work with youth.

Building partnerships between youth agencies

The development of cross-sectored partnerships can enhance the coordination of services and decrease the likelihood that services are duplicated. Suggestions for partnership building include the continuation of the after-care worker project and having on-site workers from other sectors within agencies to act as a resource for staff and youth.

Cross-sectored project and service development

The development of partnerships and projects between the two sectors is already underway in Hamilton. They have lead to a greater understanding of the benefits and processes involved in cross-sectored project and service development. The next steps for achieving this objective are:

Build on knowledge and partnerships developed through the after-care worker project.

The after-care worker project has provided an opportunity to learn about the processes needed to develop cross-sectored partnerships and projects. Future projects should build on the knowledge generated by the project and the partners involved. An interim evaluation has been developed and would be a good resource for working toward this objective.

Continued development of shared projects

The cross-sectored partnerships and services developed in Hamilton demonstrate the benefits of shared projects. Planning should involve the combined efforts of management and front-line workers to strategize the means for meeting project objectives.

Continue to work collaboratively to develop youth services

Cross-sectored service development will provide the opportunity for agency partners to coordinate services and build a more efficient system of youth services. Collaborative work will increase the likelihood that programs are developed by the agency best suited for the task; that competition for programs and funding will be decreased; and that funding can be shared to build larger, more comprehensive services.

Systems planning

A finding in our research is that collaborative work must address the differences between the two systems and develop methods for working across them. This involves systems planning on a larger scale and is an ongoing process of learning and developing. The next steps for achieving this objective are:

Identifying service trends in Hamilton

Cross-sectored collaboration should involve the identification of the macro-level service trends that are emerging across the community as a whole. Agency managers and directors can identify these trends by coming together and sharing their service usage experiences.

Long term relationship building across sectors

Cross-sectored partnerships should be built on a long term commitment to collaborative decision-making and community planning. Future directions and next steps should be based on a broader systems analysis instead of the availability of funding.

Development of a strategic community plan

A strategic planning approach should involve an understanding of the underlying processes and policy issues that will direct the collaborative efforts. It involves a commitment to build a set of protocols and strategic measures that will serve as a foundation for service and project development. One method is celebrating and building a profile of the collaborative work being undertaken in Hamilton.

YOUTH FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

Icebreaker

Think of one word that describes the best thing about having your own place.

Scenario #1

Julia's been a CAS ward since she was 14. She was in a foster home for two years and then moved to a group home. She'll be turning 18 in two months and will have to move out on her own.

What kind of help do you think she needs so that she can get her own place and live on her own?

Scenario #2

Tim used to be in foster care but moved out when he turned 18. He gets an apartment but has trouble with his landlord and has to move out. He goes to stay with friends but two weeks later they ask him to leave. Tim has nowhere else to go and goes to a shelter.

Why did Tim end up in a shelter and what help should have been there so he could stay living on his own?

Scenario #3

If you had all the money and power in the world what would you do to help youth like Julia and Tim find a place to live and help them to keep it?

KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS: YOUTH

1) Can you tell me about your history/ life?

2) What involvement has the C/CAS had in your life?

3) What was your relationship with your worker like/ Were you involved in any programs with C/CAS?

4) What was it like just after you left foster care/ group home?

5) What has your life been like since then?

6) If you could be the boss at C/CAS, what would you do to help other youth?

Key Informant Interview Questions: Child Welfare and Street-Involved Youth Services Directors

1) Please describe the current relationship between child welfare agencies and youth service agencies in Hamilton:
   a) What are the successes?
   b) What are the barriers?

2) What would ideal collaboration between the two sectors look like?

3) What would it take to develop more collaboration between the two sectors?

4) If you could ask the other sector one question, what would it be?

LITERATURE REVIEW: COMMUNITY PLANNING TO REDUCE THE RISK OF STREET-INVOLVEMENT FOR YOUTH LEAVING CARE

The challenges being faced by youth leaving the child welfare system is a growing concern across communities in Canada. While former youth in care may experience difficulties in many areas, street-involvement and homelessness are consistently identified as a problem. In the 2005 report, *Addressing the Needs of Street-Involved and Homeless Youth in Hamilton*, it was discovered that many of the youth participating in the research had been involved with child welfare agencies at some point in their lives. It was recommended that a collaborative effort be made to identify strategies for reducing the risk of street-involvement for former youth in care in Hamilton.

A review of the literature examining youth with child welfare involvement reveals that this population is at higher risk to experience difficulties in a number of areas. In comparison to youth who have not had child welfare contact, they are more likely to:

- Be undereducated- many have not completed high school
- Be unemployed or underemployed
- If employed, have low earnings and live below the poverty line
- Be dependent on social assistance
- Become a parent at a younger age
- Be homeless or live in unstable housing arrangements
- Have mental health issues
- Be at risk for substance abuse
- Be incarcerated/ involved in the criminal justice system[5]

These risk factors indicate that a lack of shelter is not the only issue that needs to be addressed when working with street-involved and homeless youth. Challenges in a number of areas interact to contribute to higher incidents of street-involvement.

The literature also suggests that there are specific factors that increase the risk of homelessness for youth with child welfare involvement. Experiences that impact former youth in care include:

- Problems that led to child welfare involvement in the first place are not thoroughly addressed before youth leave care.
- Youth may experience incompatible placements or frequently changing placements while in care.
- Youth may not have adequate preparation for independent living or knowledge of resources to help them to succeed.
- The absence of positive, supportive relationships in their lives may hinder youth from achieving independence.
- Youth may face independent living at a much earlier age than their peers.

These unique challenges faced by youth with child welfare involvement can create barriers that impact on their ability to successfully transition to independent living.

The number of children involved with the child welfare system in Ontario has seen a dramatic increase since the early 1990s. Child maltreatment investigations expanded from 45,000 in

[5] Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies, 2006

1993 to almost 130,000 in 2003. The number of children in care nearly doubled from 10,000 in the early 1990s to over 18,000 in 2003-2004[6]. These numbers indicate a rise in the number of youth leaving the child welfare system and a need to put a more comprehensive support plan in place. Recommendations for child welfare policy changes for youth leaving care have already been put forward by the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies (OACAS) following an extensive survey of youth and CAS staff. Another step would be a community response involving both child welfare and youth serving agencies to address the needs of former youth in care.

According to the literature, the challenges faced by youth leaving care require extensive service intervention by agencies with different areas of expertise. Youth identify that the supports needed for a successful transition include child welfare agency assistance, access to community resources and connections within the community[7]. This system of supports requires an atmosphere of cooperation between agencies along with a comprehensive plan that addresses a spectrum of needs. The literature reveals several areas that would lead to a best practices approach for community planning to reduce the risk of street-involvement for former youth in care.

Service Coordination

The Centre for Excellence for Child Welfare (CECW) recognizes that partnerships built through a coordinated effort between child welfare agencies and community organizations are needed to provide a system of supports for youth leaving care[8] Likewise, the OACAS survey found that child welfare staff believe that linking youth to community services such as "housing, education, social engagement, health and mental health resources"[9] improves their chances for success. Overall, the literature indicates that a more holistic approach to service provision through communication and integration will reduce the risk of street-involvement for youth. Addressing a variety of needs within a comprehensive framework can improve outcomes in several ways:

- A wider range of identified needs will be addressed by the services best suited for the task.
- The overlap of risk factors will be recognized and addressed more effectively.
- The possibility of referrals being made to an agency not able to provide appropriate service will be reduced.
- A combination of complementary services can provide more flexibility in supporting the needs of individual youth.
- Youth will be seen as individuals and also in the context of the broader community that can be influenced to improve their circumstances.
- It will be less likely that youth will fall through the cracks.

Service integration is consistently promoted in the literature as a means of reducing the risk of street-involvement through a coordinated community effort.

Resource Information

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[6] Gough, 2005
[7] OACAS, 2006
[8] Reid and Dudding, 2006
[9] OACAS, 2006

The availability of resource information has been identified by both youth and service providers as an important support for youth striving towards independence. Youth participants in the OACAS survey reported a need for "information about what they are entitled to regarding money and services from the CAS and from community"[10]. Knowledge of community resources has been identified as both a skill and a means of support for youth since it gives them the ability to find help when they need it. The literature indicates that resource education should be implemented in two ways:

- Agency workers need ongoing training in order to provide accurate and current information about accessing resources.
- Agencies need to actively provide comprehensive resource information to the youth who will benefit from them.

Since services within child welfare and community agencies are frequently changing, resource education needs to be ongoing and involve all services who work with street-involved youth.

Youth Involvement

The willingness of youth to access resources and services is greatly dependent upon their perception of that particular program. Services must be designed and delivered in a way that is seen as beneficial and meaningful to them. The involvement of youth in the development and implementation process is an important component in the community planning process. The Office of Child and Family Service Advocacy (OCFSA) recommends that young people be offered "routine opportunities to voice their opinions as experts of their 'lived experience' in care"[11] and to translate this "into meaningful action that resonates across all levels of decision making, policy and practice"[12]. Similarly, it is recognized that youth will have more success working towards their goals if they lead in the development of their plans for independent living. Youth are seen as gaining a sense of ownership from "the ability to work towards their own future instead of having it imposed upon them"[13]. Further benefits identified by the literature are:

- Youth are provided with an opportunity to develop leadership skills.
- Youth's ability to impact upon services that affect them is increased and volunteer involvement is promoted.
- An opportunity is provided for improved communication and relationships between youth and social service staff.
- The voices of youth are integrated into service development, implementation and evaluation.
- The possibility that programs need to be revised because they prove ineffective or underused is reduced.

Program Development

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[10] OACAS, 2006
[11] Findlay, 2007
[12] Findlay, 2007
[13] Reid and Dudding, 2006

According to the literature, agency communication is an important component in identifying gaps in service and providing a wider awareness of problem areas. This is perceived as the impetus needed to promote the development of new programs or expand the scope of existing ones. Community cooperation is considered a key factor in this process in several ways:

- Front-line service providers in specific agencies are often aware of gaps in service through direct work with the youth population.
- Child welfare workers who interact directly with youth are in a position to identify after care supports that are not being adequately provided.
- Agency partnerships provide an opportunity for solutions to be reached in a collaborative programming effort.
- Needed services that do not fall under the mandate of any particular agency may be achieved through smaller expansions in several youth programs within the community.

While funding and mandate issues may prevent agencies from working directly on programs together, the opportunity for creative community solutions may open up. A broader awareness throughout the community is the first step in the initiation of programs to reduce the risk of youth street-involvement.

The research makes it clear that street-involvement and homelessness are common experiences for youth from the child welfare system who strive toward independent living. The literature addressing this problem suggests that changes to child welfare policy needs to be accompanied by a plan for intervention by the community as a whole. Several areas are consistently identified as providing areas of opportunity for improving service to this population. Together they point to the importance of multi-agency coordination and communication in developing a plan for intervention.

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Appendix C

MODEL REVIEW CASE STUDIES

Case Study #1

One-stop service centre for youth in care- The child welfare agencies in one city have established a centre that provides services to youth with child welfare histories. The centre addresses a comprehensive range of youth needs and works in collaboration with an extensive list of community partners.

The Pape Adolescent Resource Centre (PARC) is a joint venture between the Children's Aid Society of Toronto, the Catholic Children's Aid Society and Jewish Family and Child Service. Their mandate is to assist youth between the ages of 15- 24 years who are presently or have been in the care of any of these agencies. PARC works with youth during their transition to independence by providing access to practical resources, the opportunity for decision making and a point of connection for developing or receiving support. Young people are offered assistance in the areas of employment, education, housing, identity, sexuality, emotional/mental health, substance abuse and life skills. PARC supports youth to become self-sufficient by linking them with the broader community so that they can develop supportive networks outside of the Centre.

Case Study #2

Child welfare services in the community- Child welfare agencies have developed services that are housed in the community to service youth. These include a transitional housing project, an addictions counseling service and a semi-independent youth shelter.

The Children's Aid Society of Ottawa has a community based transitional housing project for youth leaving care. Youth aged 18- 21 years of age who are on semi-independent living (SIL) or extended care and maintenance (ECM) and have completed a Preparation for Independence Program are eligible for the project. There are one to three homes in the community that house up to four youth and a mentor. Youth must be in school or an educational program and have or be looking for part-time employment. The transitional setting gives youth the opportunity to prepare for independent living by saving money, receiving guidance and planning for their independence. It also allows youth to continue to develop life skills such as budgeting and money management as well as personal, social and emotional maturity. Youth can stay in the transitional housing for up to a year.

QUESTIONS FOR THE OTHER SECTOR: COLLABORATIVE SYSTEMS CONSULTATION AND CHILD WELFARE AND STREET-INVOLVED YOUTH SERVICES PERSPECTIVE

Participants from the child welfare system, street-involved youth services system and front-line workers from both systems were asked the following question:

If you could ask the other sector one question, what would it be?

Participants from the child welfare sector:

- What is the complete run-down of your services.
- I would ask: How do you reach success?
- How well are people working together that did not come here today- what are their biases and barriers to working collaboratively.
- I would like to find out if there is a list available of services that the local community services have that are free for youth.
- From their perspective, what is the value added from having staff from CW working in the community?
- Are you seeing any measurable success in the work you're doing?
- Did you do what you set out to do and where's the evidence?

Participants from the street-involved youth services sector:

- What is the role (do they think) is the role of the social service agency- some place youth in a social service agency and they drop out of youth's plan-expect social service agency to make plans for youth and not involved in the planning process.
- What is the criteria that the youth needs to meet to be placed in an OPR.
- Are there behavior/mental health criteria.
- Can somebody from CAS be available on an ongoing basis to respond to questions related to CAS?
- The duty to report for C/CAS youth over the age of 16.
- Do not have a question.
- To the child welfare system: Can you get more "manpower"(workers) so youth feel that they are being followed up with and not "dropped" at shelters. I know, easier said than done!
- How can we best break down the barriers we both have and work together towards a meaningful result? How can we move forward? How can we best work together with no pressures so that there is improvement in the way we work with the kids? How do we service youth who are in both sectors to serve best before thinking of funding, etc?
- Why do you not want to remove the barriers for kids? If want them to be healthy citizens, why wouldn't you collaborate?

AFTER-CARE WORKER PROJECT INTERIM EVALUATION

1.0 BACKGROUND

In 2007, the Catholic Children's Aid Society (CCAS) in partnership with the Children's Aid Society (CAS) and the Street-Youth Planning Collaborative (SYPC) received funding from the Homelessness Partnership Initiative to develop the after-care worker project. The project's purpose is to provide housing support to youth at risk of homelessness. Four after-care worker positions were created; two workers were hired by the CCAS and two by the CAS. The after-care workers are housed in street-involved youth service agencies in the community serving various youth populations (see chart below). Project development and supervision are provided jointly by child welfare and street-involved youth service agencies in Hamilton. The project partners are CCAS, CAS, Good Shepherd Youth Services, Wesley Youth Housing and St Martin's Manor.

The objective of the project is to provide support to youth in maintaining their housing in the community. The after-care workers are to meet this objective by providing services that include friendly visiting and mentoring, landlord/ tenant advocacy, life skills development and linkage to service.

The staff, employers, host agencies and youth populations involved in the after-care worker project are organized as follows:

Staff	Employer	Host Agency	Youth Population Served
One part-time employee	CCAS	Good Shepherd Brennan House, Brennan House ACTS and Angela's Place	Transitional Housed Youth
One part-time employee	CAS	Wesley Youth Housing	Transitional Housed Youth
One full-time employee	CCAS	Good Shepherd Notre Dame House	Shelter-Involved Youth
One full-time employee	CAS	Catholic Family Services- St. Martin's Manor	Community/ Independent Youth

As part of the project funding an interim evaluation of the after-care worker project has been completed. This report outlines the findings of the evaluation's research and includes sections on methodology, program statistics, evaluation outcomes and conclusions.

2.0 EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

The focus of the evaluation was to gather the perspectives of the main stakeholder groups involved in the project- the project partners, project staff and youth who use the program.

Project Partners

Two focus groups were held with the partners involved in the project. One focus group was held with partners from the child welfare sector and had two participants. The other group was held with partners from the street-involved youth services sector and had six participants.

Project Staff

A key informant interview was conducted with each of the four after-care workers.

Youth Participants

A survey was disseminated among youth who use the program. Fifteen youth participants completed the survey.

3.0 PROJECT STATISTICS

The after-care worker project aimed to serve 100 youth during the pilot phase of the project. In the period from June 2008 to March 2009, the project actually provided service to 127 youth clients. The demographics, project activities and project outcomes are outlined in this section.

Demographics of Program Participants

Age
The after-care worker project was mandated to provide service to youth aged 16- 24 years old. The highest percentage of youth clients was within the 18 to 20 age category, representing over half of the youth who used the service. The percentage of youth in each age group was:

- 15 to 17 years old: 30%
- 18 to 20 years old: 53%
- 21 to 24 years old: 17%

Gender
The number of youth according to gender was split almost evenly- 51% of the youth clients were male and 49% were female.

Housing History
Out of the127 youth clients, 55% articulated a history of homelessness upon intake to the project. This statistic may be not entirely accurate (and likely low) since youth were asked to self-identify their housing history.

Project Activities

The after-care workers were to meet the project's objective by providing service in the following areas: friendly visiting and mentoring, landlord/ tenant advocacy, life skills development and linkage to service. The number of times that activities in these areas were undertaken was tracked throughout the project. The area percentages are fairly consistent with friendly visiting activities being slightly higher and landlord/ tenant advocacy being lower. Most clients were engaged in more than one of these activities with the after-care workers. The percentages representing the number of times that these activities were undertaken are:

- Friendly Visiting and Mentoring: 38%
- Linkage to Service: 28%
- Life Skills Development: 23%
- Landlord/Tenant Advocacy: 11%

Project Outcomes

The objective of the after-care project was to provide support to youth in maintaining their housing in the community. Of the 127 youth clients who used the after-care workers' services, 72% had maintained their housing at the end of the data collection period. The remaining 28% of participants had a variety of outcomes (for example, back to shelter, lost contact with the project).

4.0 EVALUATION

The results of the evaluative process are organized into two areas:

1) Youth survey findings

2) Project staff and project partner findings

4.1 Youth Survey Findings

Fifteen youth were surveyed to better understand the successes and challenges of the project from a participant perspective. Youth were asked demographic information and to rate the after-care workers' helpfulness in terms of the project goals. In addition, two open-ended questions were asked to allow youth to provide specific information that pertained to their experience with the project. The surveys were disseminated during the period of November 2008 to January 2009.

4.1.2 Demographics

The demographic section of the survey asked youth to provide their age, gender and current living situation.

Age
The respondents ranged in age from 16 to 23 years old. The percentage of youth in each age group was:

Age	Response
16 years old	13%
17 years old	13%
18 years old	20%
19 years old	20%
20 years old	20%
21 years old	7%
23 years old	7%

Gender
The percentage of respondents according to gender was:

Gender	Response
Female	40%
Male	60%

4.1.3 Current Living Situation

Respondents were asked to check a box that corresponded to their current living situation. The percentage of youth in each of the seven areas was:

Current Living Situation	Response
Rent apartment	47%
Rent room	33%
Shelter	7%
Transitional housing	0%
Living with friends	0%
Living with relatives	0%
Other	13%

4.1.4 After-Care Worker Helpfulness

The survey asked respondents to rate the helpfulness of the program in eight different areas. In each domain they were provided the opportunity to respond that the program was:
1) Helpful 2) Somewhat Helpful 3) Not Helpful 4) Doesn't Apply

Area #1: Helping me to deal with my lease or landlord:

Category	Response
Helpful	73%
Somewhat Helpful	7%
Not Helpful	0%
Doesn't Apply	20%

Area #2: Helping me to connect with services such as OW, food banks and lunch programs:

Category	Response
Helpful	80%
Somewhat Helpful	13%
Not Helpful	0%
Doesn't Apply	7%

Area #3: Helping me with skills such as cooking, cleaning and grocery shopping:

Category	Response
Helpful	66%
Somewhat Helpful	20%
Not Helpful	7%
Doesn't Apply	7%

Area #4: Helping me by visiting me or listening to me:

Category	Response
Helpful	80%
Somewhat Helpful	20%
Not Helpful	0%
Doesn't Apply	0%

Area #5: Helping me to learn about my rights as a tenant:

Category	Response
Helpful	80%
Somewhat Helpful	7%
Not Helpful	0%
Doesn't Apply	13%

Area #6: Helping me with things such as job searching, school enrollment and health appointments:

Category	Response
Helpful	73%
Somewhat Helpful	13%
Not Helpful	7%
Doesn't Apply	7%

Area # 7: Helping me to learn skills such as budgeting, organizing and managing time:

Category	Response
Helpful	73%
Somewhat Helpful	13%
Not Helpful	7%
Doesn't Apply	7%

Area #8: Helping me by being available and reliable:

Category	Response
Helpful	100%
Somewhat Helpful	0%
Not Helpful	0%
Doesn't Apply	0%

4.1.5 Open Ended Questions

Survey respondents were asked two open ended questions:

Question #1: How has the after-care worker made it easier for you to keep a place to live?

The respondents gave a diverse range of answers to this question. Some comments centered on the "friendly visiting" aspect of the program and included "she is someone I can talk to" and "she is there when I need her". Life skills development was also mentioned particularly in the area of budgeting and time management. Several respondents commented that the after-care worker had helped them with their apartment and their landlord. Linkage to service was also mentioned including "making me aware of contacts that are helpful to me". Overall, the respondents made positive comments about the after-care workers such as "without her help I wouldn't have a place to stay".

Question #2: How can the after-care worker program be improved?

In response to this question, ten participants wrote that the program did not need to be improved because it was effective the way it was. Three of the respondents did not write comments in this section of the survey. Two additional comments were that the after-care workers should have a presence at the Living Rock and that they should provide more assistance with budgeting and school.

The full comments from the open ended questions section are listed in Appendix B.

4.2 Project Staff and Project Partner Findings

Project staff was consulted by conducting key informant interviews with the four after-care workers. Project partners were consulted by conducting two focus groups; one with partners from the child welfare sector and one with partners from the street-involved youth services sector. The perspectives of these stakeholder groups are included in this analysis.

The following three questions were presented to the interview and focus group participants:

1) What are the successes/ strengths of the project?

2) What are the challenges/ unexpected outcomes of the project?

3) How can the project be improved?

The project staff and project partner findings are organized by the three questions used in the evaluation process.

4.1.2 Successes/ Strengths of the Project

The successes of the project were identified by the evaluation participants in six key areas; provision of a needed service, project flexibility, advocacy, cross-sectored education, cross-sectored partnership building and new developments.

Provision of a Needed Service

The evaluation participants identified that the project provides a needed service that was not previously available in the community. According to the project staff, a gap in service existed for youth who had obtained housing but needed further support to maintain it. The effectiveness of the project relies on the ability of the after-care workers to work directly with youth in the community and provide a spectrum of services that addresses individual needs. These services include landlord advocacy, life skills assistance, connection to community services and friendly visiting. Additionally, the after-care workers can work with youth up to 25 years of age while many other services are mandated to serve younger youth.

The project partners identified that the after-care workers add value to the work being done within their agencies by providing a service that was previously unavailable. A lack of staffing and resources hindered the street-involved youth services' ability to provide after care support to youth once they were housed. The mobility of the after-care workers allows them to provide outreach to youth without being constrained by on-site agency commitments. Additionally, the after-care workers can provide service to youth who contact agencies for assistance but do not fit the agencies' mandates.

Project Flexibility

The evaluation participants indicated that the multi-faceted and flexible nature of the project contributes to its success. The project staff articulated the importance of providing individualized service to youth that is difficult to achieve within the set programming structure of youth agencies. Friendly visiting is an important part of their work that is not mandated within other service structures. The after-care workers indicated that this area of their service results in a more open and relaxed relationship with youth and increases their ability to provide effective service. After-care workers do not need to enforce rules and expectations that are attached to agency services and can interact with youth in a less formal manner.

The project partners identified that youth are responding well to the flexible nature of the project. They indicated that the ability of the after-care workers to be adaptable, creative and energetic was an effective means of connecting with youth. It was also articulated that the project staff were efficiently using a wide range of community resources to fulfill the individual needs of youth.

Advocacy

According to the evaluation participants, an effective aspect of the project is the after-care workers' ability to advocate on behalf of youth. The project staff indicated that youth's ability to maintain housing was often compromised by circumstances that they had difficulty addressing on their own. The after-care workers have provided mediations with landlords, counseling and

assistance with services to prevent youth from becoming homeless. The street-involved youth services participants have noticed a decrease in the amount of youth who re-enter the shelter system when their housing fails. They attribute this success to the advocacy and support available to youth through the project.

Cross-Sectored Education

According to the evaluation participants, the project has provided an opportunity for cross-sectored education to occur. The project staff indicated that their work in the community has allowed them to gain knowledge of the street-involved youth services sector including their values and mandates. They have also been able to share information about the child welfare sector with the community partners they have connected with. Cross-sectored education and information-sharing has also been experienced by the project partners. They indicated that their increased knowledge of the other sectors' work has lead to a greater understanding of the differences and common ground that exists between them. In addition, participants from the child welfare sector articulated that they had developed knowledge about the other local Children's Aid Society.

Cross-Sectored Relationship Building

The development of cross-sectored partnerships is another identified outcome of the project. According to the after-care workers, they have developed partnerships in the community that have lead to shared resources and collaborative planning for youth. Their knowledge of the child welfare sector also allows them to assist community partners in navigating that system. In addition, the after-care workers are members of the Street-Involved Youth Network (SIYN) that is made up of staff from the youth services sector in Hamilton. Their work with the SIYN has provided opportunities for collaborative service planning and the development of proactive measures for reducing youth street involvement.

Project partners indicated that a valuable outcome of the project is the cross-sectored partnerships they have developed. The increased connection between agencies has lead to greater access to services and resources for youth. In order to develop the project, the partners learned about the other agencies and developed methods for working across their differences. Overall, they identified that the project has bridged a gap between the agencies to increase the community's ability to address the needs of youth.

New Developments

According to the evaluation participants, a successful outcome of the project has been the development of proactive programs for addressing youth street-involvement. The after-care workers have worked with community partners to develop educational tools that focus on preventative measures in areas that contribute to youth homelessness. New programming includes group presentations on budgeting, hygiene and tenant rights for shared accommodations. A life skills cookbook and educational posters are also being developed for youth living in transitional housing.

4.2.2 Challenges/ Unexpected Outcomes of the Project

The challenges and unexpected outcomes of the project were identified by the evaluation participants in three key areas; agency differences, project development and cross-sectored collaboration.

Agency Differences

A unique aspect of the after-care worker project is that child welfare staff are housed in street-involved youth services agencies in the community and supervised by both sectors. The project staff indicated that many challenges arise from being employed by one agency and working out of another one. The two sectors have their own policies and mandates and these differences were difficult to navigate during the learning phase of the project. The rules pertaining to each agency were a challenge to learn and to incorporate into their role as an after-care worker. In addition, there was sometimes a lack of working space in the community agencies and private spaces for youth consultations were compromised. Overall, the after-care workers articulated that they lacked a "sense of belonging" and a "home base" during the orientation phase of the project.

Project partners indicated that the diverging mandates and policies between the two sectors were difficult to manage. The sectors have differences in employee pay and hour schedules because the child welfare workers are unionized while most of the community services are not. The child welfare sector was also perceived as having a more structured and less flexible set of employee guidelines. In addition, the amount and type of resources that are available within the two sectors differs and this creates a challenge for project collaboration. Overall, it was identified that the employee expectations of the two sectors was challenging for both project staff and partners.

Project Development

A challenge identified by the project staff was the development of the after-care worker role. Defining the responsibilities of the new position was an ongoing process throughout the beginning phase of the project. The after-care workers indicated that the clarification process took a considerable amount of time and adjustment. The staff members at their host agencies were also unclear about the new role and the after-care workers needed to constantly clarify their mandate. Educating the broader community remains a continuing process that is necessary to increase the amount of youth referrals made to the project.

The project partners were also presented with challenges in developing the role of the after-care worker. When the project was launched it was relatively unstructured and the development process reflected this. Partners from the street-involved youth services sector indicated that the staff orientation process was much longer than expected and that many details needed to be worked out as the project unfolded. Diverging supervisory expectations was put forward as a challenge as each sector has their own methods of overseeing staff. The child welfare sector indicated that they needed to develop new management styles for supervising off site employees and to gain understanding of community services supervisory methods. In addition, the after-care workers have different learning styles that needed to be addressed during the orientation process. The project partners identified that the development process required an extensive amount of time for both staff orientation and planning meetings.

Cross-sectored Collaboration

Cross-sectored collaboration is an integral part of the after-care worker project. The project staff identified several areas in which collaboration presented challenges in their work with youth. Their connection to the child welfare sector was a barrier in working with youth who did not want to be involved with that system. Likewise, their connection with a community agency could strain their relationships with youth who had negative perceptions of that particular service. In addition, misconceptions and bias that exist within agencies about the other sector created barriers to effective working relationships. They indicated that they sometimes encountered an environment of "ownership" of youth clients from workers in both sectors.

The project partners indicated that collaboration between the two sectors was a challenging and time-consuming process. The participants from the street-involved youth services sector identified that an extensive time commitment was necessary to develop effective collaboration on the supervisory level. They also indicated that collaboration was hindered by a lack of awareness throughout the child welfare agencies of the after-care project and the partnerships that have been developed. The child welfare sector participants identified that challenges to the collaboration process were communication and time barriers that needed to be overcome.

4.2.3 Project Improvements

The project staff indicated that the project could be improved by housing the after-care workers together in a neutral location instead of in community agencies. They identified several benefits that would result from this arrangement. Firstly, the four after-care workers would be in constant contact and could collaborate more fully in youth programming and service. Secondly, they felt that the host agencies would not be exposed to liability and policy conflicts such as transporting youth in workers' vehicles. Lastly, the challenges presented by a lack of space within community agencies would be resolved. In addition, they suggested that the project should include more funding for programming expenses and youth incentives.

The street-involved youth services participants identified several areas for project improvements. They indicated that a more collaborative process was needed for hiring staff and developing the parameters of the workers' roles and expectations. They also articulated the benefit of holding regular monthly meetings that included supervisors from both the child welfare and community services sectors. Another suggested improvement was to increase the hours of part-time after-care workers so that all staff had full-time positions.

The participants from the child welfare sector suggested that the after-care worker project be located in a separate office instead of being housed in either community or child welfare agencies. They also articulated the need for a central manager who oversees the workers and the project's process. In addition, they indicated that funding for additional programming and incentives should be built into the budget to provide more support for youth.

5.0 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the evaluation participants identified that the after-care worker project was providing an effective and necessary support for youth in Hamilton. Youth survey respondents were overwhelmingly positive about the project and the assistance it was providing. The project staff and partners indicated that the project was filling a service gap that previously existed for youth maintaining housing in the community. In addition, it was identified that the project was promoting cross-sectored education, partnership building and program development. The project also faced some challenges in its development including policy differences, definition of worker roles and collaborative processes. Suggestions for project improvements were changes in staff location, supervisory processes and additional funding for programming.